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ABSTRACT

This report points out some of the difficulties encountered by both professional extension personnel and indigenous aides who are hired to work with the disadvantaged. The first problem involves the selection of potentially effective aides, and is followed by difficulties in the aide's family as they adjust to her job situation. The homemaker's aide is expected, after three weeks of training, to become a program salesman, social worker, confidante, referral agent, and change agent. Accepting her as a person and giving her job security are priorities in making her feel a part of the ongoing extension program. She must not be forced into the middle class mold before she is ready for it. The professional home demonstration agent also requires help as she is forced into the role of supervisor of these aides. Aides that can assist with her former job with middle class women are a possibility. A paraprofessional organization would not serve the needs of nutrition aides as well as some of the currently available programs do. (CL)

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WHAT IS NEEDED IN THE EXTENSION SERVICE TO ENHANCE THE ROLE OF THE PARAPROFESSIONAL AND THE PROFESSIONAL? *

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* Slightly revised version of paper prepared for delivery in New York City to the Northeast Regional Directors on March 3, 1972, by Dr. Marilyn A. Jarvis-Eckert, State Program Leader, EFNEP, West Virginia. Reproduced with permission.

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Extension Needs the Paraprofessional to Implement Programs Among the Disadvantaged

According to a 1971 report entitled, "Program Performance," prepared by the Synectics Corporation for the Extension Service, USDA: "The value of the aides for the target population had been well demonstrated in pilot projects and the indigenous aides had performed effectively in early stages of the program and held great potential for the future. It remains a valid conclusion that the use of indigenous aides is one of the strongest assets of the (EFNEP) program." Personally, I would add that the indigenous aide is the key to all of Extension's ability to related to the disadvantaged and to enable the disadvantaged to reach toward the mainstream of society.

The traditional role of Extension (e.g., meeting the person on the street or in the home and, through education, elevating that person to independent decision-making) may be utilized in the implementation of all programs for the disadvantaged. The personal attention, sophisticated analysis of needs, and guided, non-threatening application of self-administered solutions have been effecting change for years. The indigenous aide, however, is the linking person to establish rapport and open up opportunities between Extension and the disadvantaged. The effectiveness of Extension's role with the disadvantaged depends upon this aide, as the ambassador to the poor, from whatever program she represents (be it nutrition, homemaking, EFNEP).

I think we all agree that the indigenous aide is the one we want and the one we will employ. In all of the following remarks about aides and para-professionals I will assume that they are chosen from among the ranks of the disadvantaged they will serve.

The target for the Expanded Food and Nutrition Education Program is the low-income or disadvantaged homemaker and her family. Volumes have been written on why, how and when they got that way; I will not attempt a literature review on the subject. At the present time, Extension has been asked to reach out to that group - and, largely, Extension has responded, but often with middle-class methods, tools and evaluation procedures.

I do not wish to appear overly critical of Extension. Many so-called poverty oriented program staffs have had to regroup and reconsider the low-income persons for whom they are at the point of contact. Each program has started with middle-class ideas. The low-income group is different. Let me mention a few contrasting characteristics.

The middle-class has financial security; the poor has none - spending even a dime is ponderable. The middle-class is sociable and can relateto the community; the poor are isolates who fear community organization. The middle-class is accepted by the community; the poor are not. The middle-class can reason and is willing to participate in long-range goals; the poor need instant completion of short-term goals - perhaps even within one day.

The struggle to survive until tomorrow is overwhelming and projects must not cloud the issue of self-survival. The middle-class has the mental capacity to derive from a concept a specific action appropriate to that concept; the poor have to be shown how to do something of immediate benefit.

The poor are anti-social, you say. Perhaps alienated is a better word. Their behavior is based on their past struggles, perhaps for generations, and on their lack of success and their resultant defense mechanisms. As we approach each low-income person on a one-to-one basis, it does not matter what those individual struggles were, we must be capable of meeting them at their present level, and get on with helping them to help themselves. How can Extension, 1972, help them?

Guidelines Are Needed for Recognition of Potential Aides

The typical aide in West Virginia is 40 years old, with two or three children, with a disabled or underemployed husband. She probably has not held a job since marriage, if ever, and her formal education background probably is 9-10 grade level. She has known very little beyond the very poverty level of which we speak and for which we ask her to be the change agent. She is different from her neighborhood low-income homemakers because she exhibits some qualities of upward mobility and **because** she owns and drives a car.

Her ability to verbalize may be accepted as an indicator that she is upwardly mobile, but this is often a trap for the employer, one that we are learning to be wary of. The applicant who chatters a lot about her homemaking skills may not be able to organize those skills to teach others. She may talk a lot but get nothing done. She may not be able to progress toward EFNEP goals with her program families.

I have been unable to find any workable checklist for guidance in choosing the aide who will do the "best" job. Somehow, I feel that "in the beginning" is where we should begin. If we make better choices, the rest of the tasks will be easier. Perhaps that is naive. Of one thing I am certain: It is very difficult for the extension establishment to accept the aide for who she is and where she is educationally, socioeconomically and psychology - at the point of entry into employment. Her values are not our values. Therefore, how can we e-value-ate her for employment? I would like to see a task force working on the criteria for selection of potentially effective aides.

The Stresses and Strains of the Training Period

The aide is interviewed, accepted for employment and thrown into a myriad of training sessions, record keeping exercises, technical subject matter, leadership roles in speech-making, log-writing and plans of work, and new relationships with other employees - mostly professional - in the county office. Meanwhile at home, husband and children, who are used to mother's availability to suit every whim and fancy, must maneuver themselves into compliance with a new pattern of availabilities. Wife and mother is changing - new work hours, new knowledge, new relationships.

The whole question of who is boss and who is servant is up for grabs, and no one in the household has had the proper courses in psycholo y to sort out the interdependencies, the insecurities, the adaptations needed to support this wife and mother in her new role. She has doubts and feelings of inadequacy which she may or may not be able to express adequately, especially during the initial training sessions. An empathetic trainer-agent can do much to alleviate such anxieties at this point. Without help in adjusting family and aide to the new job situation, the new aide is a potential drop-out from the beginning.

The new aide must be accepted as a person at her own level upon entry into the workplace. This bears underlining and repeating. If Extension is willing to accept the challenge of employing the indigenous homemaker, then Extension must accept the homemaker at her level. The aide's wardrobe will be familiar and suitable for her own needs in her own neighborhood. but it will not anywhere nearly approach the matched ensemble on that Master of Home Economics, the Home Demonstration Agent. Can existing extension employees ACCEPT the difference?

Similar examples may be found in grammar and table manners. This is not to say that changes in appearance and habits will not come about, but they should be self-initiated, not imposed. Other changes, however, must be exacting and learned during the initial training. Specifically, I refer to the technical aspects of nutrition. Authoritarianism must control the input of nutrition subject matter. The ease with which this is accomplished depends upon the communication techniques of trainer-agent to aide and upon the clearly defined limits of operation spelled out for the aide (e.g., working only with normal diets, not special diets).

Another whole area of difficulty is encountered when the trainer-agent begins to structure the aide's activities with respect to her use of time each day. No doubt, the aide has been running her own home in a rather laissez-faire way, but now she needs to account for her hours at work and travel time - in minutes. She must learn to substitute empathy for emotionalism in dealing with suffering families - stereotypes of her own to which she is emotionally attached. She must learn a new discipline of self-control in the face of her own and other people's problems. If she is not psychologically prepared to deal empathetically with the hunger, squalor, filth and abuse which she will face, she soon will resign for "personal reasons" - "I just can't take it," she will say. Thus, the whole area of human relations is a necessary and equally important component of orientation along with the nutrition information.

In West Virginia, we have a State Program Assistant in the area of Human Relations, a post I recommend for duplication in each State. The West Virginia Human Relations Assistant develops training materials on subject areas, such as values and attitudes of the disadvantaged, establishing rapport with the poor, first visit techniques, and ways to deal with the program family's problems. All this know-how is essential before nutrition education can begin.

Once in the Field, We Expect the Aide to Be Program Salesman, Social Worker, Confidante, Referral Agent, and Change Agent

The aide becomes, in three weeks, an instant teacher in adult education. She has learned that this means you start where the adult is, teach what she wants to know, and watch her put the information into practical use, thus effecting change - hopefully, for the better. "Starting where the adult is" implies that she must relate to an adult homemaker who is probably her social equal, perhaps even lower.

The aide must establish rapport with a homemaker who has been labelled "hard-to-reach" by all the social experts in the field before her; she must assess the needs of this family (become a family case worker), set up priorities and arrange for agency referrals with a reasonable degree of appropriateness, assess the homemaker's learning ability, and THEN begin her nutrition teaching - expecting to accomplish a certain number of lesson plans within a time limit (1-2 years). She must continue to work within an arbitrary structure to facilitate progress.

The following anecdote may illustrate that the degrees and levels of activities expected of our aides, after three weeks of indoctrination, reach far beyond the demands we make on agents who have received baccalaureate diplomas after four years of college:

> "Here is a success story from Mercer County. In 1969, Aide I found a family so badly in need of help, she didn't know where to start. At this time there were eight children, the Mother was expecting anytime; the Father was on Social Security for a mine accident, almost killing him and ruining his back for life. The house was unbelievable, dirty, messy, and plain terrible. Into this home arrived child nine, a girl. She also found problems; the family had lost the house and had nowhere to go. The aide advised the family to go to the FHA office for a low-income loan. They went and were approved. A home was provided. Aide I persuaded Mother to attend a Family Planning Clinic where pap smears were done. The next few months showed some progress in nutrition training but then more problems; Mother was found to have cancer from the Screening Test. Through this she was turned over to a doctor for treatment. The treatment was slow, but again progress, though, so slowly because of frequent illnesses and nine children in a small basement that the family had built. Aide II arrived and through a discussion the family found out they were eligible for more money to dig a well and build rooms upstairs. The Economy Kitchen started and the mother never missed a lesson. She can fix many dishes now and has the strength to try a new adventure. She is always ready to sing the praises of the Expanded Nutrition Program. Still more problems; the 16-year old son wanted to quit school and was skipping school badly. Aide II suggested a part-time job and schooling program available in combination. He tried it and was accepted. The last visit he met the aide thrilled to death because of a trip to Washington, D. C. He's never been in a big city before."

"The family is much improved in outlook, nutrition, and knowledge. Mother can bake bread, cakes, make any kind of dish she is interested in. The Basic Four Chart is pasted on her cabinet door and is used daily to help her prepare well balanced meals. Since Aide II showed her the Comparison Cards, she frequently refers to the food value in conversations. The children are well, the house cleaner, the family happier. Most of the things the aides knew to tell her about. The family did not know about agencies or anyplace to turn when there was trouble. But, the Aide had been taught and is helping this family stand alone. They need help occasionally, but not as often, not as serious. This family unit is strong now because someone took the time to help and cared when they had no place to turn. Just mention the Expanded Food and Nutrition Program and you'll hear from this family."

Barbara Tankersley
Mercer County
EFNEP Aide

Margaret Meador
Supervising Agent

What I am asking you to do is to walk in the aide's shoes for a few weeks, from the point of leaving home for the first day of training, until one month later, when, with facts and diagrams, and blank record sheets, and plans of work, and MIS forms, and dietary recall forms, she attempts to apply at her work place - the kitchen without stove or groceries - the practical knowledge we have poured into her during her training period. In the meantime, her own personal life has changed with respect to children and husband. Good old Mom is now the breadwinner, the mobile member of the family, the one who is getting book-learning. Now she has a whole new set of her own problems and the Extension Establishment has brought them about.

Do we recognize or help with personal problems? Or do we gloss over them with talk of career ladders and unionism? Maybe these are important, and we will touch on them later, but we have first to look at this new employee in our midst as a person, a person who has been asked to make a commitment to work with the disadvantaged. If she cannot be accepted as a person, she cannot make the commitment.

You know, when we train the aide to work with the disadvantaged, we are training her to work with her own kind. What applies to the target group applies to her, also. The agonizing years ahead when she works with families represent a telescopic view of what we have expected her to undergo herself during her training.

When we employed the aide we agreed by definition that she would be from the disadvantaged group. We must recognize that she needs time to adjust to a daily job outside her home, she needs a clear understanding of the limits of her job, and she needs time - still being herself - to effect her own change. Squeezing her into a middle-class mold at the moment she walks onto her job will lead only to frustrations, absenteeism and eventual resignation.

Maybe the Extension Establishment Has Aimed at the Wrong Target

Perhaps it would be helpful for Program Leaders to think of the aide as the terminal beneficiary of the program - focus on her as the target and consider what happens beyond with the program families as just frosting on the cake. If Extension could mobilize, train and employ over 10,000 aide candidates a year, what a proving ground we would have in breaking the long cycle of unemployment among the disadvantaged! Let the aide stabilize at her new level, give her time to do well in establishing rapport with new people, in organizing her time a d materials to reach another adult, in learning the red tape and personalities in agency referrals, in adjusting her own family interrelationships, and in developing her own self-identitiy as a working adult woman with a limited degree of factual knowledge about nutrition.

Many of our aides are willing to continue with their employment as initially outlined. In fact, in an eight-county area in West Virginia employing 18 aides, there was no turnover during the 1971 calendar year. In other areas, there has been as much as a 36-percent turnover. Out of 158 aides in 1971, we had a statewide turnover of 23 percent. I firmly believe that many of these were due to poor initial selection, although a few resigned because they were pregnant or their family left the area. Some of these aides found immediate employment in their new locations.

Acceptance as a person is the first priority in making the aide feel a part of the ongoing extension program - acceptance for whom and what she is at the time of entry, with a great deal of flexibility in allowing her to establish her own identity as a working mother and member of the extension team. This requires as much emphasis in training the existing extension team to accept her as in training her to relate to them.

The second priority is job security. The aide wants to feel that she can plan on her check the first of the month. This assures the family of food and clothes and schoolbooks to a degree never before realized. The threat of having to drop back to the old economic level is a haunting anxiety present in every one of our aides. They need constant reassurance of job security - for a performance well done, of course.

I regret that aides ever were bothered with the discussion on revenue-sharing. The administration in our State held a series of informational meetings for all employees, including the paraprofessionals. None of us anticipated the reaction among the aides. They could not comprehend any of the discussion once the experience the blinding horror of the possibility of losing their jobs if the change should occur.

Job security also means keeping the aide on the job as outlined to her from the very beginning. Dangling a career ladder before her adds another undue pressue to the myriads of pressures she already faces, and creates intra- and inter-office jealousies and rivalries. This does not mean that she should be trained and forgotten. It does mean continually involving her in weekly conferences with her supervisor and monthly meetings for specific continuing education programs. Give her time to adjust and improve on techniques and methods. Give her a chance to stabilize.

Some Aides Will Be Ready for Advancement, After a Time for Stabilization

Desires for greater prestige and more money, companion desires spawned by democracy, are not necessarily prevalent among low-income homemakers. "Career ladder" is not instinctively in their vocabulary.

In the context of this discussion, career ladder, to me, implies movement of the aide into a job with greater responsibilities and into a new social class. The social class jump is the one to consider first and foremost. Is she ready? And her family - does this mean relocating out of her housing development, establishing new friends, finding new schoolmates for the kids? Does this widen the social gap between herself and her husband? Can the marriage stand it? What are we planning to do to with this PERSON?

This does not mean that I speak against salary increases commensurate with duration of employment and satisfactory work performance. This is, of course, the American way of life - with some reasonable ceiling predetermined. Employers do not seem to have difficulty establishing a ceiling for other types of employees - secretaries, nurses's aides in hospitals, teacher's aides in schools, etc.

If the aide reaches the maximum salary level and feels confident to move to another job with more prestige and money, we have served her well in preparing her for better employment opportunities. Why should we have a guilty conscience about letting her improve her status under someone else's employ? When we talk of career ladders, do we have the aide's interest in mind - or our own? Who will be enhanced, and at what cost - monetarily, socially?

Whose Career, and Where Is the Ladder Going?

While we ponder that question, let us look at another extension employee, the Home Demonstration Agent. She has been around for several decades, with a secure, professional job, fairly well defined and, I might say, stereotyped for group work with vast numbers of do-good, middle-class homemakers. Suddenly we have thrust upon her the role of middle-manager or supervisor.

This is a difficult enough job in itself, but we ask her to middle-manage adult women, often older and far more experienced in the school of hard knocks than she is, and from a completely different social class. The HDA may have empathy for this person from a new and different clientele group, or she may categorize her as a lazy, apathetic, conniving, dirty person from "across the tracks." Or, she may be so overwhelmed with her new found disadvantaged friend that she adopts her as a sister, taking her into her home for meals and holidays and family vacations - quickly moving the aide into a middle-class stereotype, a carbon copy of herself. Outwardly, that is. But, inwardly, the internalization process may not have caught up with the new wardrobe, new makeup, new hair-do. Frustrations?

The HDA, in the meantime, hears from her middle-class clubs that her time is being spent with "this new program for people who always will be lazy and useless, anyway." "Where is OUR fair share of your time," they shout! And Zap - the HDA is frustrated, too! The HDA needs training to accept the responsibilities of middle-management, but with the particular emphasis on middle-management of the disadvantaged-turned-employee. Again the whole subject of human relations becomes essential.

Two New Aide Possibilities: Club Assistant and Agency Referral Assistant

The HDA has a time management problem, also. Already, she may be running a 60-hour week, although reporting only 40 hours on her MIS. Now we ask her for a day a week - possibly more - to supervise new aides, solve their program family problems, and keep knowledgeable about traditional nutrition and its current fads.

Something has to give - and sometimes it's the HDA herself. Another job turnover! She needs help. Either she needs someone to help with the middle-class club women - getting meeting places, arranging for speakers, etc. - or she needs help in collecting agency referral information for her nutrition aides. The former kind of helper might be a new kind of homemaker club assistant to work with middle-class clubs, which brings up the question "who will pay?" The latter could be an agency referral assistant who keeps on top of "who helps whom and how." Funding of such a position seems a justified obligation of the expanded nutrition budget, as the nutrition education program cannot function without interagency referrals. A very great deal of aide time is spent on this now; a central clearinghouse for the county could streamline this greatly.

Either of these new jobs, however, would require a person from a higher socioeducational level than our beginning nutrition aide. Each would require persons with greater organization expertise and with the ability to relate primarily to the middle-class. Such a new employee would be a junior grade HDA, would need to be at least a high school graduate but, depending upon the community to be served, probably would function better with more formal education than that. These are new job opportunities that are needed desperately to fill gaps in the organizational ladder to achieve a smooth running extension program. These are not, however, rungs of the ladder most of our low-income nutrition aides can climb, unless they possess or can acquire these middle-class qualities. If they have them, they should enter at the point of junior HDA, not work up from nutrition aide.

Where Should the Career Ladder Be Reaching?

I think we have come now to the question: "Is the career ladder a means to climb within the extension organization, or is the ladder a means for developing a logical, integrated extension organization to aid all extension clientele - irrespective of their status, but in proportion to their need?"

Need for another rung in the ladder becomes obvious when we ask ourselves what to do with a low-income homemaker after she has been receiving visits from the aide for one or two years, has learned the basic nutrition information, and has begun to show signs of wanting to break out of her isolated station in life. In West Virginia, we "graduate" such homemakers to groups of two, then four, and gradually condition them to join special interest groups that utilize subject matter other than nutrition, such as sewing. From this kind of group meeting, the homemaker may progress into a home demonstration club, usually joining with other low-income homemakers, rarely joining an established middle-class club.

The new rung of the ladder could be served by a nutrition aide who is skilled or trained in this kind of group organization and management. She still would be dealing with low-income homemakers and would be a natural selection to continue with them into this newly formed independent club status.

If our regularly employed aides continue with their homemakers into groups, however, we lose time from the one-to-one home visits. The solution would be to continue the regular nutrition aides at the one-to-one home visit level, and create a new position category (somewhat better renumerated and more prestigious) to provide persons to work with the group activity or special interest group programs. These group leaders would be club organizers, to be sure, but they would continue to be involved with their own class of persons.

Is There a Need for a Paraprofessional Organization?

Another question turns up around the coffee tables; it deals with the admission of nutrition aides to the Women's Extension Service Organization, or some similar kind of group. The first question in my mind is: "For what purpose?" Socializing? Continuing education? Collective bargaining?

If the purpose is to socialize, I will summarize my opening remarks about aides. They tend to be from low-income groups, with all the inherent problems, and they may need years of time to adjust to working and socializing with and relating to all their coworkers in the office. Initially, the low-income person is not ready to socialize with the master's degree level Home Economists because of educational, psychological and economic reasons. By enticing or coercing either group to join the other prematurely, a whole new set of problems will arise. Here, if anywhere, a social ladder is needed, beginning first with an aide organization, separate and apart from the professionals. If, after a period of coworking, one should invite the other to cross the line, integration will occur comfortably. Begin first, however on a one-to-one basis in the county office.

In West Virginia, we have an annual conference for aides and their supervising agents to spend three days together at the State 4-H Camp. This year's Planning Committee of aides and agents has just met. They assembled themselves in the conference room which I had arranged with chairs in a circle. They arrayed themselves as aide, agent, aide, agent, etc.

This was the first meeting of the aides and agents I have attended where they mixed their seating arrangement. Usually agents are definitely at one end, or one row or circulating, while aides huddle in a group together. It's an unwritten code, and there is no overt hostility about it, but it says something as loudly as the squabbles concerning the seating arrangements at the Paris Peace Conference years ago.

The Planning Committee arranged for leadership roles to be handled by agents, and work-type roles by aides - and I wonder if the twain ever will meet, or if they should meet. The aides want to do the familiar, even if repetitive; the agents want the new, the daring, the challenging. Aides want to see familiar faces; agents want the experts, known or unknown. Aides want to entertain each other with homemade talent shows; agents want to hire commercial entertainers. Can we honestly put these two into one organization for socializing - and expect success?

If the purpose for this new organization is for continuing education, I question whether this is something that should be managed by the aides in their own organization. In West Virginia, we spend one day each month on continuing education. This is managed and programmed by the State Leader, upon reasonable requests for the aides or agents, and all aides and agents participate. I believe continuing education is necessary, but it should be controlled or coordinated from the top. The annual conference is both educational and social.

The third reason for an aide organization might be for collective bargaining. The question is: "Should we allow this so Extension has a chance to offer some input, or should we let it occur by default from the outside?" I am not familiar enough with the politics or national trends of this to offer an opinion. I can say that, unless we recognize the aide as a person, rather than a second rate citizen, we will have problems.

Extension has the expertise to relate to the needs of all classes of persons, and we can begin with these wonderful, dedicated aides. We must begin by choosing them wisely, training them well within clearly defined limits, maintaining continual contact with them, and being aware of their personal needs. Let us all relax and wait for our new found employees to catch their breaths, and try their knowledge, before pressuring them in new directions.

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